

Welcome to the White House. May God bless your talents, and may God continue to bless our great country. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:23 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Geno Auremma, women's basketball head coach, Jeffrey Hathaway, athletic director-designate, and Diana Taurasi, player, University of Connecticut; Don Lucia, men's hockey head coach, University of Minnesota; Kathryn A. Martin, chancellor, University of Minnesota-Duluth; Carmelo Anthony, men's basketball player, Syracuse University; and Mike Tirico, sports commentator for ESPN and ABC.

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney 2004 Reception

June 17, 2003

Thank you all. I would say take a seat, but—[laughter] Thanks for coming. There's nothing like having a few friends over for a cocktail or two. [Laughter]

I appreciate you all being here. I had an uneventful ride over from the White House; nobody got hurt, and my Segway is parked outside. [Laughter]

I do want to thank you all for coming. Your support is laying the groundwork for a strong nationwide effort next year. Your support is going to help us achieve a strong nationwide victory.

I want to thank you for your help tonight. I want to thank you for what you're going to do as well. I want to thank you for helping to invigorate the grassroots all across this country. I want to thank you for the phone calls you'll make, for the signs you'll put up in the yard, and for helping spread the positive message of this administration.

The political season will come in its own time. Right now, this administration is focused on the people's business. We've got a lot on the agenda. We will continue to earn the confidence of the American people by keeping this Nation prosperous, strong, and secure.

I want to thank Marv and Doro for reading the introductions just like I wrote them. [Laughter] I really am sorry that one member of our family is not here, the great First

Lady of the United States. She sends her best. Now that she's not here, I can tell you I am incredibly proud of the job she is doing. She is a strong, steady, gracious First Lady. And I say, "Now that she's not here"—she'd probably be angry with me for bragging on her.

I want to thank the chairman of our campaign-to-be, Marc Racicot. I want to appreciate Marc for his service to our country. I appreciate so very much my friend Mercer Reynolds' willingness to be the chairman of the Bush-Cheney National Finance Committee. This is our first event, as Marv and Doro indicated. It also happens to be Mercer's 58th birthday. He doesn't look a year older than 58. [Laughter]

I want to thank Julie Finley, Shelly Kamins, Jim and Sandy Langdon, Dwight and Martha Schar, and Dick Hug for being the cochairmen of this event. I want to thank all the folks who worked hard to put it on. Mostly, I want to thank you all for your generous contributions.

You know, in the last 2½ years, our great Nation has faced some great challenges. And we have acted decisively to confront them. I came to this office to solve problems, not to pass them on to other Presidents and other generations. I came to seize opportunities and not let them slip away. We are meeting the tests of our time.

Terrorists declared war on the United States, and war is what they got. We have captured or killed many key leaders of the Al Qaida network, and the rest of them know we're on their trail. In Afghanistan, in Iraq, we gave ultimatums to terror regimes. Those regimes chose defiance, and those regimes are no more. Fifty million people in those two countries once lived under tyranny, and now they live in freedom.

Two-and-a-half years ago, our military was not receiving the resources as needed, and morale was beginning to suffer. We increased the defense budget to prepare for threats of a new era. And today, no one in the world can question the skill and strength and spirit of the United States military.

Two-and-a-half years ago, we inherited an economy in recession. Then the attacks on our country, scandals in corporate America, and war affected the people's confidence,

and that hurt our economy. But we acted. We passed tough new laws to hold corporate criminals to account. We got the economy going again because we worked with the United States Congress to pass historic tax relief, not once but twice.

This administration stood on principled ground. We understand that when Americans have more take-home pay to spend or invest, the economy grows and people are more likely to find a job. We're returning more money to American families to help pay their bills. We're reducing taxes on dividends and capital gains to encourage investment. We're giving small businesses incentives to expand and to hire new people. With all these actions, we have laid the foundation for greater prosperity and, more importantly, more jobs all across America so our fellow citizens have a chance to live the American Dream.

Two-and-a-half years ago, there was a lot of talk about education reform but not much action. So I called for and Congress passed the No Child Left Behind legislation with a solid bipartisan majority, delivering the most dramatic education reforms in a generation. We're bringing high standards and accountability to every public school in America. Every child can learn the basics of reading and math, and every school must teach those basics. This administration is challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. The days of excuse-making are over. We now expect results in every classroom so not one single child in America will be left behind.

We have reorganized the Government and created a Department of Homeland Security to safeguard the borders and ports of America and to protect our people. We passed trade promotion authority to open new markets for America's farmers and ranchers and manufacturers. We passed a budget agreement that is helping to maintain spending discipline in Washington, DC.

On issue after issue we acted on principle. We kept our word, and we made progress for the American people.

And I want to thank the United States Congress for joining in these achievements. We will continue to work together to change the tone in Washington, DC, by showing good will and by focusing on results.

One of the reasons this administration has been successful is because I have surrounded myself with really fine men and women who serve the people of America. They're task-oriented people. They know their job is to get results on behalf of the people.

There is no finer member of my administration than our Vice President, Dick Cheney. He's a great friend, a great adviser, a steady hand. He is the finest Vice President our Nation has ever had, even though Mother may not agree. [*Laughter*]

The Vice President and the members of the Cabinet and all who work in this administration have formed a great team of true public servants who put the interests of the American people first. In 2½ years, we've come far, yet our work is only beginning. We have great goals worthy of this great Nation.

First, America is committed to expanding the realm of freedom and peace for our own security and for the benefit of the world. And second, in our own country, we must work for a society of prosperity and compassion so that every citizen has a chance to work and succeed and realize the promise of America.

Across this world, it has never been more clear that the future of freedom and peace depend on the actions of America. This Nation is freedom's home and freedom's defender. We welcome this charge of history, and we will keep this charge of history.

The war on terror continues. The enemies of freedom are not idle, and neither are we. The country will not rest; we will not tire; and we will not stop until the danger to the free world is removed. Yet, our national interest involves more than eliminating aggressive threats to our safety. Our greatest security comes from the advance of human liberty, because free nations do not support terror. Free nations do not attack their neighbors. Free nations do not threaten the world with weapons of mass destruction.

As Americans, we believe that freedom is the deepest need and hope of every human heart. And we believe that freedom is the right of every person. And we believe that freedom is the future of every nation.

I also understand that unprecedented influence brings tremendous responsibilities. We have duties in the world, and when we

see disease and starvation and hopeless poverty, we will not turn away. On the continent of Africa, America is now committed to bringing the healing power of medicine to millions of men and women and children now suffering with AIDS. We will lead the world in this great work of rescue.

We face challenges at home, and our actions prove that we are equal to those challenges. We have a duty to keep our commitment to America's seniors by strengthening and modernizing Medicare so they have more choices and better access to prescription drugs. The time has arrived for Congress to pass Medicare reform, and that reform must give seniors good options that meet their needs. Members of Congress and their staffs currently get a choice of health care plans, and seniors ought to have the same kind of choices, including the choice to keep their Medicare coverage the way it is. If choice is good for Members of the United States Congress, it is good for America's seniors.

And for the sake of our health care system, we need to cut down on frivolous lawsuits which increase the cost of medicine, lawsuits which increase the cost of medicine and force good doctors to shut down their practices. People who have been harmed by doctors deserve their day in court. Yet, the system should not reward lawyers who are fishing for a good settlement. The medical liability issue is a national problem that requires a national solution. No one has ever been healed by a frivolous lawsuit. The health care system needs Federal liability reform now.

And we have other measures to do to make sure our legal system is fair. I strongly support the class action reform bill passed by the House of Representatives last week, a bill which will ensure more settlement money goes to real victims, not to trial lawyers.

Speaking about legal matters, I have a responsibility as President to make sure the judicial system runs well. And I have met that duty. I have nominated superb men and women to the Federal courts, people who will interpret the law, not legislate from the bench.

Some Members of the Senate are trying to keep my nominees off the bench by blocking up-or-down votes. Every judicial nomi-

nee deserves a fair hearing and an up-or-down vote on the floor of the United States Senate. It is time for Members of the Senate to stop playing politics with American justice.

The Congress needs to pass the comprehensive energy plan I submitted. This Nation must promote energy efficiency and conservation. We must work to develop cleaner technology. And we need to produce more natural gas here at home. We've got a problem with supply of natural gas. And sure, conservation will help with that problem. But we've got the technology necessary to explore for natural gas without damaging the environment. For the sake of economic security and for the sake of our national security, we must make America less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

Our strong and prosperous Nation must also be a compassionate nation. I will continue to advance our agenda of compassionate conservatism, applying the best and most innovative ideas to the task of helping our fellow citizens in need. There are still millions of men and women who want to end their dependence on Government and become independent through work, so we must build the success of welfare reform to bring work and dignity to the lives of more Americans.

Congress should complete the "Citizen Service Act" so more Americans can serve their communities and our country. And both Houses should reach agreement on the faith-based bill to support the armies of compassion that—who are mentoring to our children, caring for the homeless, and offering help to the addicted.

A compassionate society must promote opportunity for all of us, including the independence and dignity that come from ownership. I believe strongly in promoting an ownership society. We want more families to own their own home. We want people to have a—own a piece of their retirement. We want Americans to own their own health care plan. And we want people to be able to start their own business. As Republicans, we understand that when somebody owns something, they have a vital stake in the future. An ownership society is a hopeful society in America.

In a compassionate society, people respect one another and take responsibility for the

decisions they make in life. My hope is to change the culture from one that has said, "If it feels good, do it; if you've got a problem, blame somebody else," to one in which every single American understands that he or she are responsible for the decisions that you make; you're responsible for loving your children with all your heart and all your soul; you're responsible for being involved with the quality of the education of your children; you're responsible for making sure the community in which you live is safe; you're responsible for loving your neighbor just like you would like to be loved yourself.

I will continue to work to see that the responsibility era arrives in America. And we can see it beginning to happen, as a result of the culture of service that is arising around us. I proposed and started the USA Freedom Corps to encourage people from all walks of life, all across America, to extend a compassionate hand to neighbors in need. And the response has been strong.

Our faith-based charities across America are also strong, and they're vibrant, bringing hope and healing to our fellow Americans. Policemen and firefighters, people who wear our Nation's uniform, are reminding us what it means to sacrifice for something greater than yourself. And once again, the children of America believe in heroes because they see them every day.

In these challenging times, the world has seen America's resolve and courage. And I have been privileged to see the compassion and the character of the American people. All the tests of the last 2½ years have come to the right nation. We're a strong country, and we will use that strength to defend the peace.

We're an optimistic country. We're confident in ourselves, and we're confident in ideals bigger than ourselves. We seek to lift whole nations by spreading freedom. And at home, we seek to lift up lives by spreading opportunity to every corner, to every person of this great country.

This is the work that history has set before us. We welcome it, and we know that for our country better days lie ahead.

May God bless you, and may God continue to bless America. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:46 p.m. in the International Ballroom at the Washington Hilton. In his remarks, he referred to his brother, Marvin Bush, and sister, Dorothy Bush Koch; and Republican National Committee chairman Marc Racicot.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

June 18, 2003

Medicare Reform

The President. I want to thank the Members of the United States Senate for coming to discuss the issue of Medicare. I want to congratulate Leader Frist as well as Chairman Grassley and Ranking Member Baucus for really fine work on the Finance Committee to get a important piece of legislation moving. We're committed to reforming the Medicare system so America's seniors get the health care they need.

These Senators around the table have got to work together to see that we get a good plan. I asked them to come so I can figure out ways that our administration can continue to help the process move forward. The work has been really strong thus far. And I want to congratulate you all for fine leadership. Welcome to the White House.

I'll answer a couple of questions. Scott [Scott Lindlaw, Associated Press].

British Prime Minister Tony Blair

Q. Mr. President, Tony Blair is in a bit of trouble at home. He's got a couple of ex-Cabinet officials contending he may have exaggerated information on weapons of mass destruction. He stood by you. Do you plan on saying anything to back him up at home?

The President. Yes, I'll say something right now. He operated on very sound intelligence. And those accusations are simply not true.

Iran

Q. Mr. President?

The President. Yes.

Q. Are you hoping the protesters in Iran will topple the Iranian Government? And now that the IAEA report is out, how are